

Comic Cuts 2^D AND LARKS

[No. 2,690.]

THE CRUSOE KIDS LET THE MATES GET IT IN THE NECK!

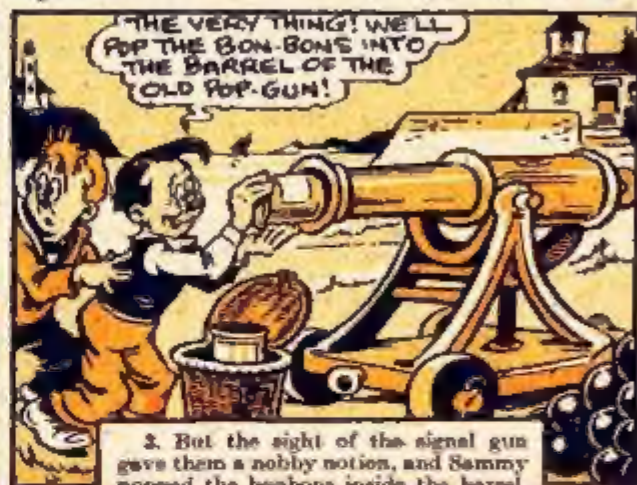
[JUNE 6, 1942.]



1. The kids were packing a hamper for a picnic ashore. But the mates spotted them.



2. So they went on their track. "That's caused it!" gasped Sammy. "Look out!"



3. But the sight of the signal gun gave them a nobby notion, and Sammy popped the bonbons inside the barrel.



4. Then up oozed the mates and they wanted to know where those bonbons were. At that moment—



5. The coastguard decided it was time to fire the gun, and it went off with a big boom. Out shot two tins of bonbons, the mates stopping one each on the back stud.



6. It knocked them flat, and the bonbons bounced out of the tins which busted.



7. But 'twasn't long ere the mates came to and they chased after our two nibs.



8. They didn't get very far, though, for they stopped on the tins and—oosh! Ow!



9. Down they came again. The kids passed the word to the crowd below for free bullseyes.



10. "Whoopie!" was the cry, as they rushed up the steps. Some scramble. Ask the mates.



11. They were badly battered and had to clear the litter. So the kids toddled!

Kenton Steel's Latest Case.

VANISHING DIAMONDS!

The Changed Packet.

NUTTY BROWN was alone in the consulting-room of Kenton Steel, the famous crime-smasher, waiting for his chief to return from a case that had taken him off early that afternoon.

"There goes seven o'clock," murmured Nutty, hearing a neighbouring clock strike the hour. "And there goes the phone. Maybe that's the chief."

He picked up the receiver and spoke. But the voice at the other end was not Steel's, but that of a stranger, a man.

"Is Mr. Kenton Steel there?" he asked.

"I'm sorry, but he's out at the moment," replied Nutty. "I'm expecting him back at any time, though I can't say when for certain."

"Should he return within an hour will you please ask him to ring me," the man at the other end went on.

He then gave his name—Mollison—and added his telephone number, of which Nutty made a note. Then he rang off, and silence reigned in the office once more.

It was just before eight when Steel returned, and Nutty promptly gave him the message. Steel lost no time in ringing up Mr. Mollison.

"Can you possibly come to my office right away?" asked the latter. "My office is in Granville Buildings, just off Holborn."

"I know it," replied Steel. "I'll come along and will be with you in about a quarter of an hour."

He replaced the receiver, and a few minutes later he and Nutty were on their way to Granville Buildings, a fairly modern block of offices. The front door was closed for the night, but Steel rang the bell, and after a pause the door was opened by the housekeeper.

Having informed the visitors that Mollison's office was on the fourth floor, the housekeeper went back to his quarters in the basement. The lift had ceased running for the day some time before, so Nutty and Steel had to mount the stairs.

On the fourth floor they found two offices with the name of Mollison on the door panels of both. They entered one, the door of which was slightly ajar, and heard voices in the next room.

Making their way through the communicating door, Steel and Nutty saw two men seated at a table. One, a thin-faced man, was smoking a cigarette and sitting with crossed legs. The other, a man about fifty, short and squat, had a grim look on his face.

"Ah, Mr. Steel!" said the latter.

"Yes," replied Steel. "What is the trouble?"

His eyes were already taking in every detail of the office—the big safe against one wall, the two small microscopes on a side table.

Then his eyes fell upon a little packet reposing on the table at which the two men were seated. The wrapping was of tissue paper.

"The trouble, as you put it, is a very curious one," said the squat man, who was Mollison. "And something very mysterious has happened here earlier this evening—very mysterious indeed."

He opened the tissue paper packet revealing a glittering mass.

"You see those?" he went on.

"Uncut diamonds," said Steel promptly. "Worth a bit, I should say."

"Worth nothing!" snapped Mollison. "They're not real diamonds—they're imitation. That's why I've sent for you."

He gave a snort as he finished speaking and shot a look at the other man, whose somewhat cynical smile broadened as he lazily puffed out a smoke ring.

"Tell me what happened," said Steel.

"What happened was this," snapped Mollison. "This evening, about six o'clock, when I was thinking of going home, my staff having already departed, I had a visit from this man here—Mr. Rudd. He apologised for calling so

late, but said he had heard that I had a parcel of about diamonds for sale and he was interested. I am, of course, a diamond merchant, as you no doubt saw on the office door.

"Well, I produced the packet of stones from my safe and showed them to Mr. Rudd. He admired them, and we discussed terms. He thought the price too high, and tried to bargain. So time passed, until at last—it must have been nearly seven o'clock—he decided that he would not buy the stones after all."

"He apologised for having detained me so long, and, wrapping the stones in their paper, he handed me the packet. I went to put them in the safe, but something prompted me to have a look at them first. And directly I saw them I realised that they were not the real stones at all, but worthless imitations."

He gave another snort, and Rudd uncrossed his legs and seemed to take an interest in the proceedings for the first time.

"And that's where I came into the story, of course, Mr. Steel," he said. "For it is obvious that Mollison is of the opinion that I have somehow stolen the stones and replaced them by those imitations. He promptly said as much—and I flatly denied it, of course. What's more, I told him to send for the police. Instead of which he sent for you, which is probably just as good."

"Probably better," snapped Mollison, who was evidently very out of humour. "Well, Mr. Steel, that's how the matter stands. With only us two in this room, those uncut stones have vanished, leaving this trash in their place. I



The man took a flying leap across to the roof opposite.

invited Mr. Rudd to remain till you arrived; in fact, I insisted on his doing so."

"And I very willingly agreed to that," added Rudd with a smile. "So now, Mr. Steel, it's up to you. I'm in no immediate hurry, but I don't want to remain here all night. If the suggestion is that I have stolen the stones—then they must be somewhere on my person. That being the case, you are at perfect liberty to search me."

"Very good," said Steel.

With that he proceeded to make a most thorough and minute search of Rudd's clothing. He was up to all the tricks of the thieving fraternity. But of the missing stones he found no trace.

"Humph! They are certainly not on Mr. Rudd," he said at last.

"Then where are they?" demanded Mollison. "That's what I want to know."

"And I want to know if I'm now cleared of any suspicion of stealing them," said Rudd patiently, lighting another cigarette. "Can I go now, or do you still want me to stay, Mr. Steel? I am entirely at your disposition."

"I think I'd like you to stay for a bit, if you don't mind," Steel replied. "I suppose, Mr. Mollison, that there is no doubt whatever about the stones having been changed?"

"None at all," declared the jeweller. "I haven't got them, and they can't walk. They must be somewhere in this room. But where? And how did they disappear?"

On the Roof.

STEEL made no reply to those pointed questions. Instead he looked around again. The window he saw was closed, and the black-out curtains drawn, so the packet of stones

could not have been thrown out that way.

In silence, watched by the other three, he made a thorough search of the room. But still without success. The lost stones seemed to have vanished into thin air.

At last Steel sat down, frowning thoughtfully. Rudd glanced at his watch, yawned, and lit another cigarette. The crime-smasher's gaze turned to Nutty, and remained there.

Wrapped in thought, he beat a restless tattoo with his fingers on the table for some moments. Then he got up and paced the room again till suddenly he turned to Nutty.

"All right," he said. "There's no need for you to wait. I'll deal with this matter myself."

"Very good, chief," replied Nutty, getting up. "Good-night, all!"

With that he left the office, and after the sound of his footsteps descending the stairs had died away, Steel turned to Rudd.

"I think, Mr. Rudd, there is also no need for me to detain you any longer, either," he said. "I should like your address, of course, so that I can communicate with you if necessary."

"By all means," replied Rudd, and scribbled it down on a piece of paper which he passed to Steel, who pocketed it after a glance.

Rudd picked up his hat and turned to Mollison, who was glaring with mixed anger and doubt at this move.

"I hope the stones turn up, Mollison," said Rudd suavely. "And when they do, perhaps you might write me a few

recognised as Rudd, making for the door of Mollison's office.

A fumbling with keys was heard, and the door opened. Rudd disappeared inside, and Steel crossed to the open door. Beyond he saw the roving beam of a pocket torch which finally settled on the table.

Then the man dropped on all fours and crawled under the table, pointing the light of the torch on the under side of the top. A few moments later he was back on his feet again, making for the door.

And, just as Steel was about to grapple with him, by an unlucky chance he whisked the torch around and revealed the crime-smasher. Quick though Steel was, Rudd was quicker.

Like lightning he dropped, grasped Steel round the knees and hurled him over with a crash. Then he darted out of the office and along the corridor.

But Steel was quickly up and after him. He saw Rudd race up the stairs to the floor above, the top one, and wondered what his game was. Surely he would be trapped now?

But there was a door there giving on to the roof, and Rudd whisked through it. Steel went after him, determined to get his man. But Rudd seemed eagerly determined to make his getaway.

Scrambling along by the parapet, he reached the end. Then, as Steel came from behind a chimney stack, the man took a flying leap across to the roof opposite. He landed safely and continued his flight.

But Steel took the leap, too, and kept on his heels. To the far end Rudd ran, and then, after a rapid glance back, he flung one leg over the parapet and disappeared. Reaching the spot, Steel saw him agilely clambering hand over hand down a rainpipe running the whole height of the wall.

Steel took that route, too, realising that Rudd still held the lead. But as he went down he emitted a shrill whistle, for Nutty's benefit.

And Nutty, hearing it, came running to the scene. He stood there, looking up with fascinated eyes at the two men descending the pipe. His young jaw set firmly, he tensed his muscles for his share in the attack.

The result was that Rudd received the surprise of his life when two strong, wiry arms grasped him firmly as he reached the ground. A violent heave, and before he could recover the surrounded man was hurled violently to the pavement.

And when a few seconds later Steel reached the pavement, it was to see Nutty sitting triumphantly on his dazed victim!

"Nice work," said Steel with a smile of approval.

Grasping the prostrate man firmly, he made a quick search, and found the missing packet of stones.

"It was obvious to me from the first that, as you suspected, Rudd must have taken the gems," said Steel to Mollison a little later, after the crook had been handed over to the police. "He is a very daring rogue, and he played a very bold game of bluff which nearly came off. Of course, he skillfully palmed the real stones and replaced them with a packet containing the worthless ones he had brought with him, taking advantage of a moment when your gaze was averted."

"He may have been hoping that you would put the packet, after he had wrapped it up again, into the safe without inspection, in which case he only had to walk out to get away with it. The address he gave was a false one, as I was not surprised to find. When you discovered the exchange, he hid the real packet of diamonds under the table, sticking it with some greasy wax. And as he had to leave them there, he had to come back for them. That was what I counted on, especially after my assistant had informed me that Rudd had not left the building. He was still lurking within somewhere, waiting for us all to depart. He did not suspect that when I was drumming on the table, I was tapping a message in Morse to my assistant to go outside and keep watch, following Rudd if necessary. But it wasn't."

(Another Kenton Steel story in "our next number, on sale Friday week.)

OIL RAIDERS!

An exciting adventure of our Tank chums in Russia.

Friend or Foe?

GUNS roaring and flaming, the squadron of Valentine tanks under Major Rauld's command hurtled into the battle. All was confusion in the darkness. A small force of Russians was fighting gallantly to hold outposts won only a few days before. But the Germans, supported by strong reinforcements of tanks and infantry, were now advancing like a tidal wave.

The British tanks had been on their way to Kimbirk, in Southern Russia, but did not hesitate to race at full speed to the scene of the surprise attack. Their advent was like a miracle to the hard-pressed Russians, and proved a shattering shock to the Germans, who, having scented "easy meat," now found they had bitten off more than they could chew.

The battle roared and swayed to the westward. The bombardment by the Valentines reduced some of the German tanks to scrap-iron, and, in the confusion, some of the Huns turned their guns on their own comrades.

Gradually the forces scattered. The surviving British tanks were to link up again at Kimbirk in the morning, but for the present each was free to adopt its own best tactics.

One tank, painted with the device of an elephant, clattered away in pursuit of three German tanks. The crew were the most brilliant in the Mechanised Army—Sergeant Tom Arnold, the commander, little Tich Worley, the driver, and Elias Button, popularly known as "Rusty," the gunner, who hailed from the West Indies.

The sixteen-ton Jumbo thundered along in pursuit of the enemy and closed the range. Then Tom rapped out an order:

"Let 'em have it, old cherry blossom!"

Rusty's two-pounder gun hammered steel and tracer shells into the hindmost tank, which quickly became a blazing wreck. Little Tich swerved the tank to throw the other Hun off aim, and Rusty got on to the next target with deadly accuracy. Within three minutes the German tanks were battered wrecks, and the Jumbo made a wide sweep to the southward without sighting any more of the enemy.

The British tank waddled on, but presently developed engine trouble. Peering from the turret, Tom caught sight of a ruined fort, and a group of buildings with trellis-shaped oil-shafts beyond.

"This must be Vuldoff," he decided. "The major mentioned the place the other day when he lectured about the Germans drive for oil."

"Ee, I dare say you're right, owd lad," remarked Tich. "The point is: Who holds t' oil wells now? Are our pals the Ruskies here, or have t' Jerries taken over?"

"Go slowly to the fort," Tom said. "No one is around on this side, and maybe all Vuldoff is deserted. Anyway, we'll take cover while you patch up the engine."

Tich coasted the tank slowly down a slope, past an abandoned farm tractor, and drove through a gap in the back of the deserted fort. There were signs near Vuldoff that an action had taken place recently, but the oil wells and petrol refineries appeared to be intact.

Tom and his pals swung out of the tank, and the former switched on an electric torch. Rusty took a packet of cigarettes from inside his overalls and offered it to the others.

"Hab a gasper, old boss?" he invited. "Any ob yo' got a match? I've got no 'juice' left in de old cigarette-lighter."

"Never mind that," Tom said. "You can have your smoke-o later. You go and scout around the oil wells



The bullet cut the rope cleanly, and Rusty dropped to the ground.

and see if there are any Ruskies or Fritzes about."

The big West Indian had one advantage for a job of this sort. His overalls were dark with grease, and his face and hands were naturally black. At night-time he was as difficult to see as a coon in a coalhole.

He turned to leave the fort when there sounded a muffled yawn from the direction of a ledge in a gloomy corner. Immediately Tom swung his torch in that direction, and Tich and Rusty whipped out their revolvers. The white disc of torchlight fell on a man, who, startled by the glare, sat up sharply and swung his feet to the ground.

"Keep still!"

Tom gave the order in German, and repeated it in Russian, having picked up a smattering of that difficult language.

He decided, however, that the stranger was probably a friend owing to his appearance. The man wore a Cossack's hat, a sheepskin coat dyed brown, and baggy trousers tucked into calf-high boots. His black whiskers bristled all round his face.

The three pals stood still and watched him rise slowly, and were surprised when he spoke in fairly good English:

"My friends! Welcome, my British friends!" he exclaimed gruffly. "Behold in me a partisan who works and risks his life for our beloved Russia. It is happiness for my eyes to see you!"

Advancing across the dirty floor, he unexpectedly threw his arms round the neck of little Tich and embraced him warmly.

"G-g-good! Break away!" gasped the lad from Wigford. "Keep those bristles o' yours out of me ears! I'd sooner have me face swept wi' a yard broom!"

His pals laughed.

"What is your name, friend?" Tom inquired.

The newcomer relaxed his affectionate grip.

"Ivan Nishsky," he said.

"I've an itob-sky, too," spluttered Tich, scratching his ear. "I a'pose the Russian lasses call you t' 'Porcupine'!"

"In Russia they call me Ivan the Lion," boasted Nishsky.

"Ivan the Lion!" echoed Tich, whose hearing had been slightly impaired. "Ee, we'd better watch this covn, Tom, owd lad."

As a measure of caution, Tom "borrowed" the revolver and jack-knife that Nishsky carried. Then he asked a few questions, and was told by the "Cossack" that a number of Russians were still at Vuldoff at the refineries. But he did not welcome Nishsky's offer to go and inform them that a British tank was at the fort.

"No, you stay here, friend," Tom remarked. "We like your cheery company. Now, Rusty, you get going on that scouting expedition, find out what you can, and come back within the hour to report."

The big West Indian sallied forth, and Tom pressed the bearded "partisan" for further information, while Tich proceeded to repair the tank's engine.

Keeping to cover, Rusty came within

clear view of the oil wells and refineries, and saw a number of dark figures moving around. He went nearer to identify them if possible, and received an unpleasant shock.

"B-bless me! Dey's Jerries!" he choked. "Dey hab got de Ruskies' oil!"

Unknown to himself, he had been seen by a sentry posted at a point of vantage some short distance away. The German withdrew quietly and reported to his captain, who sent an armed squad round to the rear whilst Rusty was still trying to estimate the numbers of the enemy. They came in silence, and suddenly, before Rusty could use his gun or otherwise raise the alarm, the Germans hurled themselves upon him and dragged him away as their prisoner.

Held on the Refineries!

SERGEANT TOM ARNOLD looked at his wrist-watch and became anxious.

"Hang it! Rusty ought to be back by this time!" he remarked to Tich, who had finished the job on the engine.

"What's keeping the son-of-a-gun, I wonder?"

"May I express a humble opinion?" murmured Nishsky. "I doubt not my good Russian friends are entertaining him. They have much vodka and fine caviare. I will go into Vuldoff to see where the black man may be."

"I'll go myself, chum," Tom decided. And in an undertone he added: "You keep an eye on old whiskers, Tich."

He left the fort and roughly followed the track taken by Rusty, until he entered the oil settlement of Vuldoff. Gruff voices and laughter drew him towards a small square, and he slithered cautiously between the wooden dwellings formerly inhabited by Russian workers. Then a startling sight met his gaze.

A number of German soldiers under a captain whom he heard addressed as Kapitän Bramberg were gathered there and piling empty bottles in a heap. And hanging from the branch of a tree by a rope that pinioned his arms at the waist was Rusty Button, the West Indian gunner!

"I've not tellin' yo' nothin', yo' Hun trash!" panted Rusty amid the hubbub. "I'm a British soldier, and—"

"Obstinate schweinhund!" exploded Bramberg. "We will see what some well-aimed bottles will do for making you loosen der tongue, hein! Ach himmel! We will show how we root Germans deal mit enemy pig-dogs!"

Tom's blood rose hotly within him. These brutal Nazis were going to make a cock-shy of his pal, who hung suspended there in the light of the stars and a few storm-lanterns placed in the square. He aimed the revolver at Captain Bramberg's chest, but thought better of it.

These Germans were not carrying firearms, except that the ruthless commander had a revolver in his holster. Their rifles were stacked near a building opposite. Noting this, Tom determined to give Rusty one chance for a breakaway, for there was no time to return and bring the tank into action. He was a dead shot, and believed he might cut the prisoner down from that tree.

Tom slowed the gun and took aim at the rope at a point above Rusty's frizzy-haired head. The rope was swaying slightly, however, to the captive's movements, and this made the small target even more difficult. He dared not miss!

A signaller strode up to Captain Bramberg and saluted.

"One of our gallant Panzer divisions is advancing towards Vuldoff, mein kapitan," the man announced in German. "It is arranged for the tanks to refuel here."

"Good!" the captain exclaimed. "All shall be in readiness for them."

Tom drew a slow breath and held it. The news meant that he and his comrades were in even graver danger than it had seemed at first. These armoured vehicles of the Panzer division needed oil, and, possibly, because of the swift advance of the German vanguard, the Russians had been forced to abandon Vuldoff without having had time to destroy the wells and refineries.

His eye watched the swaying rope that suspended Rusty, and he carefully aligned the revolver sights. One shot was all that he was likely to get, and it must be a good one! Then his forefinger squeezed the trigger.

Crack! There was a sharp report. The bullet cut the rope cleanly—and the big West Indian dropped, with an amazed grunt, to the ground.

"Beat it, Rusty!" Tom yelled.

The coloured man flung the rope from his body, smashed two of the stupefied Germans headlong with his huge black fists, and bounded for the cover of the near-by buildings. With more rapid aim Tom covered his retreat, firing five more shots that dropped Bramberg and four of the brutal soldiery into the dust. Then the two pals raced helter-skelter back to the fort.

"Ee, I'm glad you're back, owd lads!" greeted Tich. "But it's a champion mug I am. Nishsky's given me t' slip."

It appeared that he had made the "Cossack" accompany him outside the fort. His object was to examine the farm tractor, which he found was in working order and contained a couple of gallons of petrol. Then suddenly the man had dodged away, and Tich had refrained from firing at him for fear of the shots attracting enemies to the fort.

"Well, you can't help being a dope, I suppose!" Tom rasped. "There isn't much doubt this Nishsky is a spy—a dirty dog of a Jerry in disguise! In which case, he'll soon bring his pals here in swarms."

The Lancashire lad asked the reason for the shots he had heard, and Rusty briefly explained what had occurred. Then the pals entered the tank, and Tich drove it slowly round under cover of some trees and came to a halt.

"Hark! T' Jerries are movin' up this way," he whispered. "What about nipping round to t' rear of 'em and busting up those petrol stores on t' other side of Vuldoff? I may be a dope, but, by goon, I've got a gradely idea for puttin' they Jerries off the scent while we do it."

"Well, cough it up—and lively," said Tom.

Little Tich quickly explained, and his pals grinned broadly. Then Tom swung out of the tank, piled some boxes on to the farm tractor to give the rough appearance of a turret in the darkness, and started up the engine. This done, he rejoined his comrades.

The tractor, with no one in it, clattered away slowly over the uneven ground in a westerly direction. Hardly had it gone three hundred yards when a hammering fire from pom-poms and machine-guns opened upon the moving object, which the advancing Germans mistook for the British tank.

Under cover of the thunderous din Tich rapidly drove the Jumbo in the opposite direction and made a wide circuit of Vuldoff to get within range of the oil wells and refineries.

Meantime, the old farm tractor was blown to pieces. The Germans discovered the ruse and dashed back, with the atrocious Nishsky among them. Then the British tank swung into view to confront them.

"Give 'em all you've got!" Tom snapped.

The Jumbo sped forward. The two-pounder and the machine-guns crashed their deadly hail among the German troops, mowing them down by scores. The spy, Nishsky, was among the first to fall, and the pals frankly exulted over his well-deserved doom.

Then the tank headed for the refineries, and Rusty poured a lashing stream of shells and fiery tracers into them. In a matter of seconds these premises and all the petrol stores were ablaze, and the devouring flames spread swiftly to the oil wells.

The job was done, and little Tich beaded the tank away for the link-up with the rest of the squadron at Kimbirk.

"A beautiful bonfire!" sighed Tom, looking back over the turret hatch. "There'll be no petrol for the Jerries' Panzer party when they come up."

(Another thrilling war story in our next number, on sale Friday week.)



The greedy customer spent his time looking at the butter's face and looking for a larger butter. But he was well and truly put out by the wife's wattle.

PLUM AND DUFF, THE BOYS OF THE BOLD BRIGADE!



1. This is the way to show some! That was better than the last time! The last time was a real smash! The last time was a real smash! The last time was a real smash!



1. When I get wind that you was going to be third in the race, I finished my rubber raft. This will be for the first paper bag to hold my ration in! I said.



1. I wish I could get a paper bag to hold my ration in! I said.



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ROVER JOE

A Dash for Freedom!

WITH a smile on his lips, and the afternoon sun reddening his cheery countenance, Rover Joe jogged peacefully through the Bad Lands of Oklahoma.

Beside him, on a maddly trail, rode Bob Taylor and Spike Muldoon, two runaway reformatory boys whom Rover Joe had vowed to tame, train, and "educate."

Now the Bad Lands of Oklahoma are very well named. To the west and east sprawled the gaunt, barren hills of the Indian Territory, where dwell the Red Men, fierce and wild as the wolves and cougars that shared their wilderness.

Then, southwards, there spread a mighty plain which ran for hundreds of miles to the great oil lands that had brought fame and wealth to Oklahoma. Between this rich region and the Indian hills lay a belt of oily swamps.

Down there, swarmed streams twisted and coiled like the tentacles of a giant octopus. In between them lay the marshes, treacherously green and soft. There was oil everywhere, bubbling out of the earth in deep, muddy potholes. It was an unhealthy man, which most travellers avoided if they could.

And presently, as the horses edged past another of the oily potholes close to the trail, an idea took shape in Bob Taylor's mind.

It was a plan to escape from Rover Joe and his genial but firm discipline.

Of late, a peculiar change had come over Bob and Spike during their travels. The "wildcats" were not as surly and ill-tempered as they had been at first, and they no longer regarded their jovial "gader" with hatred.

Indeed, in their hearts they grudgingly admired the wise and ever-humorous little roamer! Joe's cheery sense of fun, his amazing skill with horse, rope, and gun, and most of all his great boyish heart, were having some effect on Bob and Spike, tough young rebels though they were.

Nevertheless, this did not mean that Rover Joe had tamed his youthful wildcats yet. Having suffered much from harsh and bitter imprisonment, Bob and Spike hungered for their own real freedom just as fiercely as any Redskin brave in the Oklahoma hills.

And so, as he gazed inscrutably at Joe's unconscious back, big Bob Taylor set his lips firmly. Then he used his eyes to flash a series of silent signals to Spike.

The quick-witted New York "slammy" swiftly understood his English chum, and obeyed.

First, with artful stealth, Spike checked his horse's stride until it dropped back a little behind Sleepy. Then, inch by inch, the freckled wildcat allowed the noose of his lariat to slide down from the saddle-horn. It touched the trail at last, and Spike let it drag. Bob, silent as ever, rode on with a face like a sphinx.

And as the three queer comrades rounded the next bend in the trail, they sighted the largest pothole so far.

It was more of a pond than a hole, in fact—a fine large pond, filled with oily mud and soumy water.

Some draggled weeds grew round the edges, which were about two feet below the level of the trail. As he sized it up quickly, Bob gave a brief but joyous grin.

"Right!" he said calmly, so quietly that even Joe was taken unaware. For when Bob spoke, Spike struck like lightning.

With a skill worthy of Joe's own teaching, the American lad whipped the dangling noose of his lariat up round Sleepy's left heel. At the same instant, Bob yanked his own horse sideways, and used his spur swiftly.

Thud! The startled animal lunged

aside, crashing hard against Sleepy, flank to flank. Roped by the heel and biffed lustily by another horse, Sleepy went thudding down the trail, flat as a pancake.

"Ouch! Dogsbodies!" yelled Joe, discovering the snappy trick too late. Hurling far out of the saddle by Sleepy's tumultuous fall, the wildcat's "boos" whirled tip over tail into the oily swamp and then sank, gurgling, beneath the slimy surface.

"Ha, ha, ha!" A great, whole-hearted shout of laughter escaped Spike and Bob as Joe's head bobbed up again, masked by shiny black mud.

"Hop it!" gasped Bob; and the chums spurred their horses furiously down the trail. They had beaten the wily Rover Joe hands down, and the wildcats, galloping pell-mell, made full use of their advantage.

Rover Joe soon saw the folly of chasing them, of course. With Sleepy's aid, he dragged himself out of the mire at last, clinging to the horse's neck. Oily ooze dripped off him; the reek of it nearly made his hair stand on end. Arms akimbo, he stood like a shiny, greasy scarecrow, staring after the runaways.

Then, very quietly, Rover Joe began to laugh.

"Why, the artful young polecats!" Joe grinned at Sleepy, who snorted. "They sure are a determined pair, our boys, grandpop, and learnin' quick, ain't they?"

"Still, if they think I'm chasing after 'em in all this smelly mud, they're mistook! Their horses are faster than you, old con, and there's about fifty streams in which they can bury their trail! We've got to get 'em back, though. Doggone, the young idjuts'll barge into all sorts o' dangers in this pesky territory! Sleepy, this is where we use our noddles to save your legs!"

On that, Joe spent several minutes in silent thought.

Then, chuckling gently, he drew out his wet and maddly matches, and spread them on a warm rock to dry. Whilst they were drying, the little roamer found a pool of fairly clear water and proceeded patiently to clean himself down.

Meanwhile, Bob and Spike gave their horse free rein, and ascended the trail south.

Neither youth knew quite where he was going, but, on the last rays of sunset, they urged their tired mounts into the mouth of a deep and shadowy gulch under the hills. They drew rein, turned for a final look back. A slight frown creased Bob's brow as he stared.

From a hilltop in the distance, a thin plume of smoke was rising lazily, black against the sunset.

There was another column swaying skywards in the west, and a third shot up, farther away still. Bob gazed uneasily.

"What d'you make of them, Spike?"

"Dunno—don't care!" grinned Spike, with typical light-heartedness. "All I know is, we've sloshed 'rough about a billion streams, and even Rover Joe'll have a sweet time trailin' us now! As for dem smoke-clouds, I guess it's just Injuns or somep'n, cookin' de cats for supper! It reminds me, bo', dat we can do wit' some grub as well!"

Wise alert, the self-reliant pair chose their camp and made preparations for the night with a skill that again did credit to Rover Joe's teaching.

Under an overhanging rock, they built a fire of dry wood that gave out a cozy warmth without much smoke. The boulder, and a handy thorn-tree, shaded the glow. Their horses they bobbed with heelropes, not together, but one on either side of the camp in case unwelcome visitors came. Then they cooked a meal from the contents of their saddlebags.

"Bo' dis is de cat's pyjamas!" grinned Spike contentedly; and Bob, with his mouth full, grunted agreement. He lay back full length, gazing up at the high stars.

And gradually—why, they could not tell—the triumphant mood of the runaways changed.

Queer though it sounds, each lad had begun to miss Rover Joe already. They seemed to have lost something

suddenly—Joe's cheery flow of wisdom and fun, the company on trail and camp-fire. Now they were alone, this vast territory felt very silent and grim. For the first time, the wildcats realised that a greenhorn can feel mighty "lost" in a wilderness.

"He—he warn't a bad old con, Rover Joe," mused Bob at last. "A decent bloke, really—and I wish I knew as much about this West as he does! But—but we're better on our own, Spike! It'll be great, fighting our own way! Don't you reckon so?"

"Yeah! Yes, sure—sure I do!" agreed Spike, in some haste. "Come on, let's forget Rover Joe and get us some shut-eye! We gotta ride ag'in before sunrise!"

Huddled in saddle blankets, close to the fire, the chums stretched out for slumber. Supper had warmed them; they felt more confident now. Their eyelids dropped, and they slept.

Grim, indeed, was the awakening that came to them!

The Torture Stake!

THERE was no warning from the horses—partly because clever trackers had outwitted the drowy animals and laid firm, skilled hands on their muzzles. All the warning Bob and Spike received was a sudden



Arms akimbo, Joe stood staring after the two runaways.

screaming, as from a hundred Scythian lips.

"Waaa-koop! Howaaagh!" rose the dreadful, caterwauling howls, all in a flash. Then, like terrible ghosts of the night, painted and feathered Red Men poured into the camp.

It must be said that the wildcats woke up and met that fearful attack with a speed and ferocity that gave the Indians a shock.

Spike struck first. Deathly white, but grim, the New Yorker snatched up a burning faggot and streaked to meet the tall, sinewy demons—with a fiery weapon. Bob was slower, but deadlier still.

Having no weapon, he smashed the first Redskin squarely over the heart with his big fist, then k.o'd the second with a savage right hook. A screaming Indian leapt at the English youth, tomahawk glittering. Bob ducked, kicked the brute's legs from under him, then stormed in like a Viking to the aid of Spike.

And for the next few minutes there raged a fight that was as glorious as it was vain.

Smothered by stalwart form, Bob and Spike lay pinned to earth at last, too spent to lift another finger. Harsh voices—terrible voices, they sounded—growled and barked. A circle of fierce faces glared down at the prisoners. It was the end of the wildcats' trail.

For suddenly two more Indians lugged forward a stout stake, which they drove firmly into the earth. As the chums' own fire was built higher, and rough hands dragged them forward, their hearts froze with horror.

It was the dread torture stake they saw then.

"Now, paleface dogs!" snarled a

force, scarred chief in broken English, when, back to back, the chums had been lashed to the stake. "Now you shall suffer the fate of all who creep into Indian land! You die by fire, white puppies! Or will you cringe and cry for Osage mercy?"

Bob's white face was waxy with sweat as he glared back into the Indian's black eyes, staring out of yellow-painted circles.

"You painted screech-owl!" bashed out the burly English youth, while Spike cheered weakly. "Start your blazing fire and get it over! We're not whining to cowardly savages like you!"

The Osage chief stiffened; and as he repeated Bob's defiance to his braves, a guttural "Wah!" burst from their throats. It sounded to the chums like the growling of fiends. It was followed by silence, deep and tense.

And then through that stillness came startling sounds. There was the leisurely click of a horse's hoofs. They heard a rollicking, unmusical voice, chanting the "Cowboy's Lament."

"Oh, huzce me not, on the knee prair-ee!"

Bob and Spike gasped together.

Rover Joe! Joe and old Sleepy—and they were riding the gulch, straight into the Indians' clutches!

"Joe! Rover Joe!" yelled Bob and Spike, with one voice. "Look out, Joe! Indians!"

Then their shouts died into strangled gasps as Rover Joe rode into the midst of Osage warriors.

The chums had to admit that there was something mighty grand about their "tyrant" then.

Joe rode slowly, with one leg hooked over his saddle-horn, and his fingers deftly rolling a cigarette. And as he entered the fire-glow, they saw his kind, friendly face beaming broadly. Bob and Spike glanced wildly at the Osages. To their stupefaction, the tall red demons were chuckling, too—which is something an Indian seldom does!

"Thank you, Chief Black Hawk, and my Osage brothers, for catching these wildcats of mine!" began Rover Joe politely, after Chief Black Hawk had spoken. Over the Indian's heads, the little adventurer grinned at Bob and Spike.

"Well, some, you made a good getaway this time, but you forgot two things," smiled Joe. "One is that Injun smoke signals are pretty near as quick as telegrams out here, and you should ha' smelt danger when you saw our smokes at sunset. Secondly, these Osages are my friends. In fact," Joe added, almost shyly, "all Injuns are my friends!"

"So we arranged a little excitement for you—just to teach you a lesson! You've done finely, too! That was grand of you, yelling out to warn me just now. And these Osages, my men, say you are brave warriors, heap force fighters, and any time you want a few Red pals, they're yours!"

For a moment longer, Joe regarded the wildcats with serious eyes.

"And now can't we be real pals as well?" he pleaded at last. "You can't get away from me, and I don't want you to! Let's quit all this scheming and fighting between ourselves. Let's be real partners—won't you?"

Bob and Spike swallowed hard. Joe had tricked them for the last time—for their own good—and, strangely enough, they were glad. They knew now that they had come very near to losing their best friend. Their "toughness" was melted.

"Joe, we quit!" Bob said huskily, and meant it.

Whereat Rover Joe heaved a vast sigh of relief. His wildcats were tamed at long last. Henceforth, Rover Joe, Bob, and Spike were partners—and pals. (Another grand Rover Joe story in next Friday week's number.)



A Champion Chuckle-raiser!

A PRETTY PLOT!

Digging For Victory.

NED NOGGE and Joe Jackley were next-door neighbours. And one fine evening, seeing Joe pottering about in his garden, Ned poked his face over the fence.

"I say, Joe," he said. "You know you were saying the other day that you wished you'd got an allotment?"

"That's right," agreed Joe, going up to the fence. "I'd like to grow plenty of vegetables, and I've not much room for them in the garden."

"Same here," said Ned. "Well, I've got some news that will interest you. I've just had the offer of a plot of land. It's not many minutes' walk from here, so it's quite handy. What do you say to coming in with me and sharing the plot—half each?"

"Sounds all right," said Joe. "But it's a bit late in the season to start now, isn't it?"

"Well, it's too late for some things," agreed Ned, "but there's plenty of others we can grow and shall be glad of later on. And in any case it will be dug ready for next year."

"Yes, there'll be the digging before we can do any planting," said Joe. "How long will that take?"

"Oh, not long if we get down to it," said Ned eagerly. "With the long evenings we can put in several hours a day and soon get it done. What do you say? Shall we take it on? It's only five bob each for the year, and we'll be able to grow vegetables worth quids."

"O.K., then," said Joe. "I'm on. Here's my five bob. When shall we start digging?"

"We could go along to-morrow evening," said Ned, taking the money. "I'll give you a hand and we'll go along together. Now I'll pop along to the chap who owns the land, sign the agreement, and give him the money."

So it was arranged, and the following evening the two men went along with spade and fork each to start operations. They found that the ground was well baked by the sun and on the hard side.

However, they both got down to it with enthusiasm, though it was not long before each felt severe backache, Ned especially.

"Phew! I'm not used to this hard digging!" he panted. "It's getting me down."

By the time they knocked off that evening they had made a fair start. But there was still plenty more to be dug, for it was a large plot. And although Ned was enthusiastic enough about growing his own vegetables, he was not so keen about doing the hard work of digging.

"I reckon Joe ought to do the digging and leave me to do the planting later," he mused that evening. "He's a bigger and stronger man than I am. But it's no good suggesting that arrangement, he wouldn't agree."

They had arranged to go along to the plot again the following evening to carry on with the good work. But when Joe called for Ned the latter informed him that he would follow on a bit later.

So Joe went on alone and started digging. Half an hour passed before Ned rolled up.

"Come on, slacker!" cried Joe, smiling. "Don't leave all the work to me. And where are your tools?"

"Well, of all the chumps!" gasped Ned. "I've left them at home! I'll go back and get them."

Off he went, but with a sly grin on his face that Joe did not see. For Ned had left his spade and fork behind on purpose, to dodge a bit more of the digging.

It was nearly half an hour later when he returned to the plot.

"I'm sorry, Joe," he said, "but I'm afraid I shan't be able to help you this evening. The things are in the tool shed, and someone's locked it. I can't find the key anywhere."

"Well, you can carry on with my tools for a bit and let me have a breather," said Joe.

Ned pulled a face at this; but, seeing



Working like a steam-engine, he got on with the digging.

that it could not be helped, he took Joe's spade and started to dig. In ten minutes he had had enough of it.

"Coo! Look at the time!" he cried, staring at his watch. "And I'm expecting a chap to come and see me on important business. I shall have to hurry back home, Joe. Sorry, old man. I'll leave you to it and give you a hand to-morrow evening."

Off he went again before Joe could say anything, and this time he was grinning more than ever. For nobody was coming to see him at all; and, once home, he took it easy in an armchair and read the paper.

"Old Joe can get on with it!" he gurgled. "And to-morrow I'll think of some other wheeze to dodge that digging. I'm not going to break my back over it."

The following evening Joe called for Ned and saw to it that he brought his spade and fork along with him this time. The plot reached, the pair carried on with the digging.

And, just as they had dug the first row, a small boy, Jimmy Rogers, who lived near them, came running up.

"Mr. Nogge, you're wanted at home at once," he panted, for he was a little out of breath. "Mrs. Nogge wants you."

"Oh, then I'd better go," said Ned. "I'll leave my tools here, Joe. I don't suppose I shall be long gone."

But once he departed, Ned did not show up again that evening. Joe dug on till it was nearly dark. Then he packed up and had to carry Ned's tools back with him as well as his own.

"Why didn't you come back to the plot?" he asked Ned when he handed him his tools over the garden fence.

"I'm awfully sorry, old man," replied Ned, "but the fact is the missus wasn't at all well and didn't want to be left alone. That's why she sent for me. But I'll make up for it to-morrow night. How's it going?"

"It's going all right," growled Joe, "but there's plenty more to be done yet. And it seems to me that I've been doing pretty nearly all of the digging up to now. Well, to-morrow's Saturday, and so we can start early in the afternoon and peg away till nightfall. The sooner that plot's dug the better."

"You're telling me!" tootled Ned.

The following day, after lunch, Joe went to the shops to get some tobacco. In the tobacconist's, which also sold sweets, he saw young Jimmy Rogers, who was buying some lollipops.

"Hello! Where did you get all that money?" asked Joe with a smile, seeing that Jimmy had put a shilling on the counter.

"Oh, that's what Mr. Nogge gave me yesterday for going to the plot and telling him his wife wanted him, when she didn't," tootled the lad. "He told me not to tell anybody, so don't you tell him."

"I won't," said Joe; and, having bought his tobacco, he came out of the shop looking very thoughtful.

"So that's his artful game, is it?" he muttered. "A pretty plot to get me to do all the hard work of digging while he dodges it. I expect that story of his tools being locked up the other evening was also a taradiddle. All right, Mr. Ned Nogge. I'll think out something for you and make you do your share."

Instead of calling for Ned, Joe went

straight to the plot and carried on with the digging. In any case it had to be done. But he was determined to stop Ned dodging it any more, if he could.

Time passed; but Ned did not arrive. Still Joe slogged away, frowning thoughtfully, when suddenly he heard a clink and his eyes gleamed.

For lying in the soil he had just turned up was half a crown.

"Whoopee! That's a bit of luck!" he tootled. "A good job I found that and not Ned. I reckon I've earned it, anyway."

He put it in his pocket and resumed digging. A few minutes later he found another half-crown.

"Another one!" he shouted. "That makes five bob, and pays for my share of the plot rent. I wonder if there's any more? If so, I shan't be sorry if Ned doesn't turn up."

But Ned appeared five minutes later, and apologised for having been detained.

"Well, get on with it now you're here," said Joe. "Don't leave all the hard work to me."

In silence they carried on. Ned had arranged another wangle to dodge off before long. But suddenly Joe gave a little yelp.

"Corks! Another one!" he cried excitedly, as he picked up a third half-crown.

"What's that?" cried Ned quickly.

He was standing quite close, and he saw the coin in Joe's hand, so there was no chance of concealing it.

"Just dug it up," explained Joe. "A bit of luck for you," said Ned.

Joe grunted and put the coin in his pocket. And, as he did so, his expression suddenly changed.

For in that pocket there should have been two other half-crowns. But they were not there. Instead, Joe felt a hole at the bottom, and realised the truth.

There was only one half-crown—and it was his own. It had fallen through the hole each time!

It was a disappointment, of course. But at the same time it gave him the

very wheeze he was seeking to teach the artful Ned a lesson.

"Yes, it is a bit of luck," he agreed. "And let me tell you that's the third half-crown I've picked up since I've been digging this afternoon."

"What?" howled Ned. "You—you've found seven and sixpence? Why, there may be a lot more here as well. Here, let me get busy."

Without loss of time he did so. Working like a steam engine, he got on with the digging. Joe, with a grin on his chivvy, made himself comfortable on the grass at the end of the plot and had a smoke.

Not that Ned minded that, in fact, it suited him. For if there were any more half-crowns to be found he wanted to find them.

So he kept slogging away, with very few pauses for rests, always hoping that something would turn up. But, needless to say, nothing did, and suddenly he realised that he had dug the whole of the rest of the plot.

And at that moment Joe woke up and got to his feet.

"Any luck?" he asked sweetly.

"No, I haven't found a sausage!" snapped Ned. "And I'm absolutely whacked. I reckon you ought to split that seven and six with me."

But instead of doing that Joe told him the truth, and showed him the half-crown and the hole in his pocket. And when Ned started to go up in the air, Joe quietly told him what he had learnt from young Jimmy Rogers.

That shut Ned up completely, and he realised he had been neatly and properly diddled. But Joe took him along to the milk bar and treated him, which soothed his feelings a bit.

And they had the satisfaction of knowing that the digging was done, anyway, and the plot all ready. What's more, they had a very successful season.

(Another of these funny stories in our next number, Friday week.)

6-6-42

OUTWITTED!

A fast moving adventure of
The THREE MUSTARDEERS

The Three Mustardeers, Roger, Jim and Mary, were watering the garden when—crack, crack, crack—they heard shots in the distance.

Dashing to the gate, The Three Mustardeers saw two high-powered cars speeding towards them. It's a chase! —the second car must be a police car. Thieves — smash-and-grabbers — whoever was in the leading car had to be stopped. Not a moment to lose. . . .

Idea! Roger snatched up the garden hose and took careful aim with the powerful

jet . . . right through the car door into the face of the driver.

Surprised — blinded — the driver lost his grip of the wheel, and, out of control, the car tore across the road to crash, head on, into a lamp-post.

Two men jumped out. Jim flung a garden rake between their legs. Down they went. They got to their feet, but—"Hands up!" yelled the Inspector from the police car.

Quickly the men were handcuffed and whisked into the police car.

"Are they catch-as-catch-can?" asked Mary.

"She means smash-and-grabbers," Inspector, said Roger. "Much more dangerous," said the Inspector, "you've done a bit of good work for your country. I'd like your names and addresses."

Two days later a Very Important Mac called and thanked them. And The Three Mustardeers glowed with pride as they learned that the two men that they had so cleverly helped to catch were dangerous Nazi agents—caught red-handed.

SAID JIM:

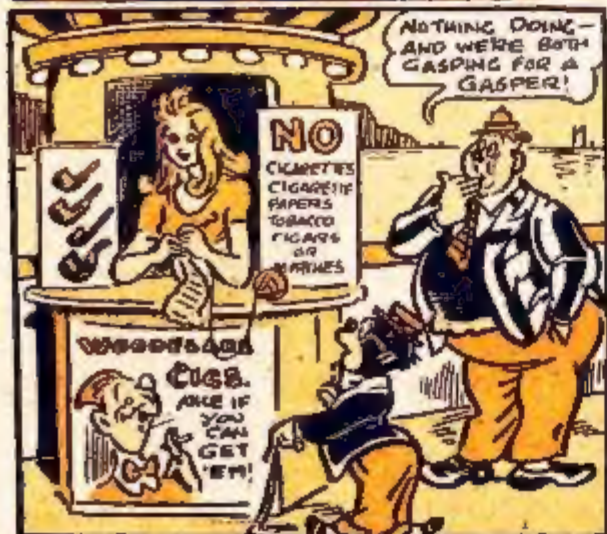
"That's good-bye to them, as the man said about his influential pears when he stepped out of the mustard bath."

COLMAN'S MUSTARD

Mustard is the hero of most "inside" stories—every boy and girl should remember that. It helps to keep your tummy in good working order so that the villains of the piece (aches and pains) don't have a chance to get hold of you. What a bit of luck—can't it?—that must be sicer with Mustard!

PINHEAD and PETE

THEY PUT A PUNCH INTO THINGS!



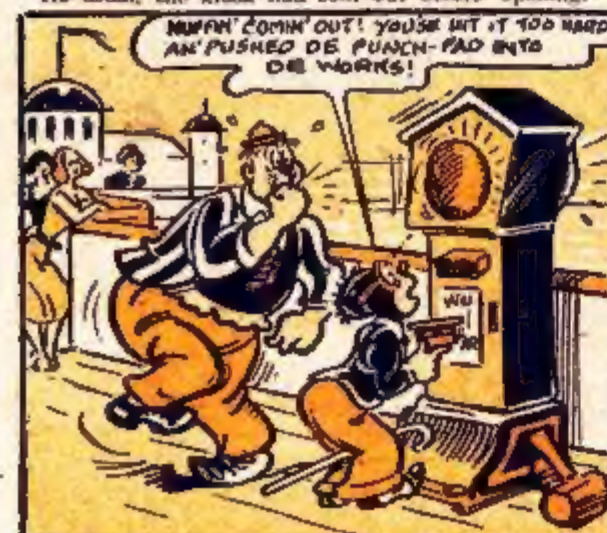
1. Our pals were in a tough spot, for having paid the price of admission to the pier, Pinhead discovered he had left his cigarettes on the mangle at home. As usual, the kiosk had sold out before opening.



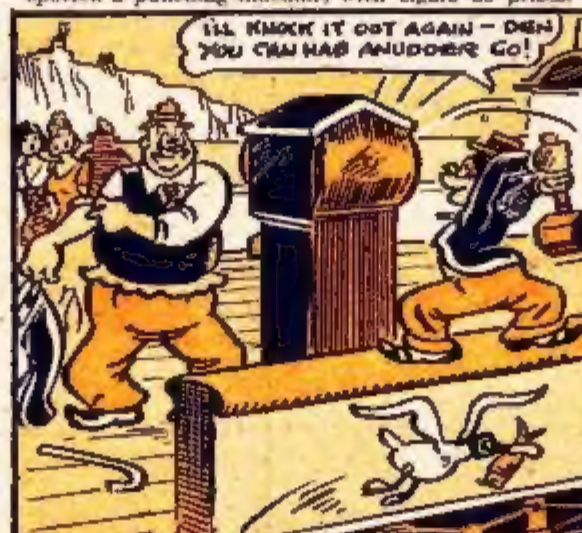
2. "Coo! What wouldn't I give for a gasper!" the big boy sighed. "Me, too!" parped Pete. "I've sure longing for de friendly lag!" Just then he spotted a punching machine, with cigars as prizes.



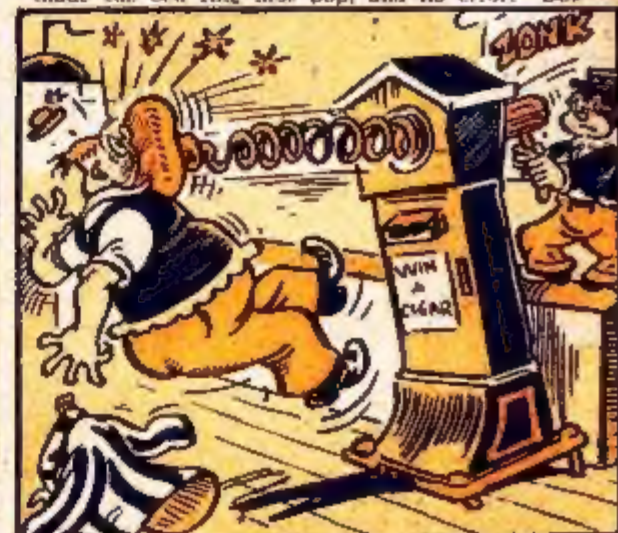
3. And not noticing that the machine was out-of-order, the coon slipped a coin into the slot, and coaxed the big boy to try his strength. Of course, Pinhead made the bell ring first pop, and no error. But—



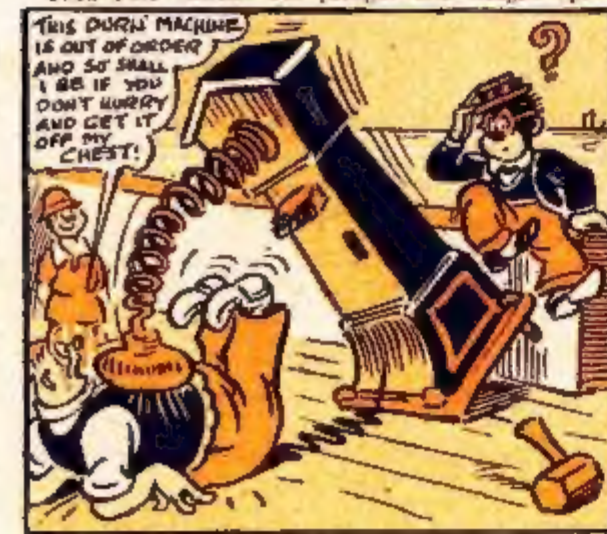
4. In spite of his striking success no cigars came their way. "Dat's funny!" gasped Pete. "What is?" puffed Pinhead. "I don't see the joke!" Then Pete noticed the plunger was caught up.



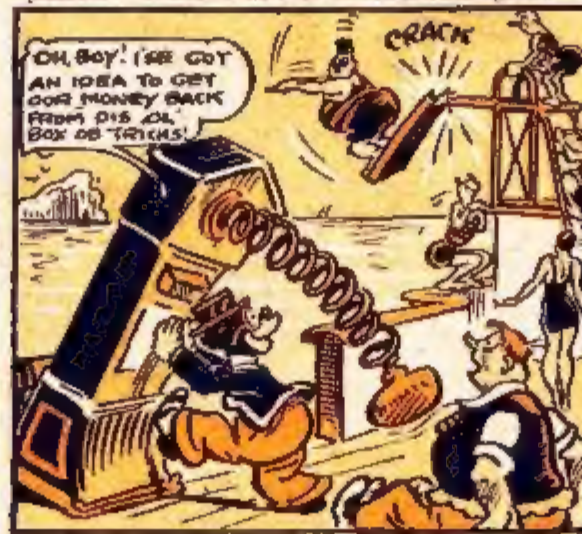
5. And with the help of a handy mallet the coon proceeded to straighten things out. "You must hab knocked de punch-pad into de works," he explained. "I knows how to knock it back again!"



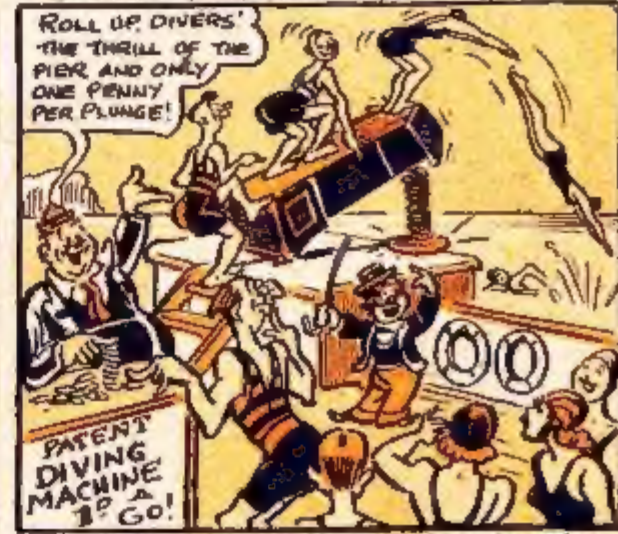
6. Pete proved himself to be a true prophet, for one terrific tap with that mallet did the trick a-treat-o. But before Pinhead could have another go that punching machine sprang quite a surprise on him. Zok!



7. "Well, dat am a fair knock-out! Now I wonder how dat happened?" parped Pete, looking puzzled. "It strikes me, chum, that this silly old punch-machine is out of order," groaned Pinhead.



8. And Pete was just pushing it back into position when he saw the bathers were having trouble with the diving-board, which had come unstuck. That gave him a great idea, and a few tickets later—



9. Our famous funsters had rigged up the useless punching machine as a patent diving spring-board, and by charging the bathers a penny per each per plunge, they very soon got their cigar money back. Whoopie!



DIZZY